



## Chapter 17: Religion and Custom

Hong Kong's Basic Law guarantees religious freedom, allowing a diversity of faiths to coexist harmoniously. The following information on different religions, which was updated to 17 November 2023, was extracted from the Hong Kong Yearbook.

### **Buddhism**

Buddhism is one of the main religions practised in Hong Kong, with around one million followers and over 400 temples, some dating back more than 700 years.

Local Buddhist groups have long aided social welfare and education. The Hong Kong Buddhist Association, for instance, was founded in 1945 and seeks to propagate Buddhist teaching and culture while providing charitable services to the public, including medical and general care for both young and old.

### **Taoism**

Taoism is an indigenous religion of China with a 2,000-year history. Hong Kong has over one million followers and more than 300 Taoist abbeys and temples.

The Hong Kong Taoist Association, set up by representatives of major temples in 1961, organises religious, cultural and charitable activities to promote the Taoist scriptures and moral values. The annual Taoist Day, held on the second Sunday of March, celebrates the birthday of the deity Taishang Laojun, or Laozi, whom Taoists believe is the founder of Taoism and the author of *Tao Te Ching*, the main Taoist text dated to the late 4th century BC.

### **Confucianism**

Confucianism is a set of religious, ethical and philosophical teachings derived from ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius that emphasises the importance of tradition and rites. These values are introduced in local primary, secondary and university teaching through the advocacy of the Confucian Academy. Other

local Confucian organisations include the Hong Kong Confucian Association and Confucius Hall.

The major Confucianism festival takes place on Confucius' birthday, which falls on the 27th day of the eighth month in the lunar calendar. The academy celebrates Confucian Day on the day following the Mid-Autumn Festival, recognised and supported by the government. Another main feast day is the birthday of ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius on the second day of the fourth lunar month.

## **Christianity**

The Christian community numbers nearly 1.3 million, most of whom are Protestants and Roman Catholics. The Greek, Russian and Coptic Orthodox Churches also have a presence in Hong Kong.

### ***Protestant Community***

The local Protestant movement began in 1841. There are now about 1,040,000 registered members spread across 70-odd denominations and no fewer than 400 independent churches, according to the Hong Kong Christian Council and surveys done by research institutes. About 1,300 congregations are Chinese-speaking. These include indigenous denominations like The Church of Christ in China (representing Presbyterian and Congregational traditions); Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui; The Methodist Church, Hong Kong; True Jesus Church and Local Church (the Little Flock). Cooperation among the churches is facilitated by the Hong Kong Christian Council and Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union.

Over 860 para-church agencies attend to the Protestant community's needs and support emergency relief and development projects.

### ***Roman Catholic Community***

The Roman Catholic Church in Hong Kong was established as a mission prefecture in 1841 and became a diocese in 1946. According to the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, there are about 395,000 Catholics served by 279 priests, 98 brothers and 419 sisters in 52 parishes, comprising 39 churches, 28 chapels and 24 halls for religious services conducted in Cantonese; three-fifths of the parishes also provide services in English and, in some cases, Tagalog,

the Filipino language. The diocese has its own administrative structure while maintaining close links with the Pope and other Catholic communities around the world.

## **Islam**

Hong Kong has an estimated 300,000 Muslims, according to the Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong.

All local Islamic activities are coordinated by the trustees, which form a charity managing all five mosques, two cemeteries and a kindergarten. They make funeral arrangements, announce the dates of festivals including Ramadan, and conduct inspections and issue certificates for halal food in Hong Kong and parts of the Mainland.

Local Chinese Muslims are mainly represented by the Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, which operates a college, two primary schools and two kindergartens.

The oldest mosque is the Jamia Masjid in Mid-Levels, built in 1849 and rebuilt in 1915, which was declared a monument in 2022. The eight-storey Masjid Ammar and Osman Ramju Sadick Islamic Centre in Wan Chai features a library, a clinic, a canteen and a kindergarten. The Kowloon Masjid and Islamic Centre, with its distinctive white-marble finish, is a landmark in Tsim Sha Tsui and manifests the true identity of local Muslims. It has a capacity of 3,500 and sees nearly one million users yearly. Stanley Mosque is inside Stanley Prison, while Chai Wan Mosque is at Cape Collinson. The cemeteries are in Happy Valley and Cape Collinson.

## **Hinduism**

Religious and social activities of the 100,000-strong Hindu community from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and other southeast Asian countries are centred on the Hindu Temple in Happy Valley, which the Hindu Association of Hong Kong manages and maintains. Worshippers use the temple for meditation, spiritual lectures, yoga classes and other community activities and to observe major festivals such as Diwali, Dussehra, Holi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Cheti Chand and Hanuman Puja. They also perform engagement and marriage ceremonies according to Hindu rites and the Marriage Ordinance. Other important services

include administrating last rites, making arrangements for cremation and related rituals and maintaining the Hindu crematorium at Cape Collinson.

The temple holds devotional music sessions and religious discourses every Sunday morning, followed by a free community meal that is also served on Monday evenings.

## **Sikhism**

Hong Kong's first Sikhs came from Punjab, India, as part of the British Armed Forces in the 19th century. The first Sikh temple, Sri Guru Singh Sabha, on Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, was built in 1901 and later renamed Khalsa Diwan Hong Kong Sikh Temple. It was reopened in November 2023 following redevelopment and features two prayer halls, a free kitchen and dining room, private function rooms, seminar halls, a digital library and a car park.

The Khalsa Diwan, a registered charitable organisation that manages the temple, offers voluntary services, including the provision of a langar (a free meal) and short-term accommodation for overseas visitors.

The Khalsa Diwan estimates Hong Kong has about 12,000 Sikhs. Followers of Sikhism founder, Guru Nanak Dev Ji attend religious services at the temple every morning and evening, and gather there on Sundays and the main Sikh holy days. Their most important religious dates are the birthdays of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji (the 10th Guru), and Vaisakhi (the birthday and baptism day of all Sikhs).

## **Judaism**

The settlement of the Jewish community in Hong Kong dates from the 1840s and comprises families drawn from different parts of the world. There are three main synagogues – Ohel Leah Synagogue (Orthodox) providing daily, Sabbath and festival services; the United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong (Reform) with Sabbath and festival services, both of which share the same premises in Mid-levels; and the Chabad Lubavitch in MacDonnell Road.

## **Other Faiths**

The Baha'i Faith and Zoroastrianism are among other religions that have been established in Hong Kong for many years.